

**COMMENTS ON SOME  
MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN PLANT NAMES**

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***ALAWČ, ALOČ, ALOČI, ALUČ***

These four terms, all quite similar, are variously and contradictorily glosses in certain lexical and botanical handbooks. Some say that *aloč* is related to *aluč*; others say that *alawč* and *aloč* go together, and *aloči* is separate from *aloč*. What is certain, though, is that they involve two common plants, one a tree (Azarole, *Crataegus Azarolus* L.), the other a flowering weed (Toad-flax, *Linaria vulgaris* L.), similar to the Snap-dragon. Let us consider each plant name separately.

Arm ալաւճ is mentioned in Amirdovlat<sup>1</sup> where he states briefly that *alawč* is the same as the plant *zarouri čepeli* (#48 ալաւճ, զարուրի ճէպէլի). This is an Arabic term, زعروري جبلي *zu'rūri jabali* 'mountain hawthorn' (= Azarole), from the first part of which comes the Latinate *azarolus*, with dissimilation. Hence Amirdovlat makes clear the identity of this plant, and his knowledge of both botany and Arabic make him a virtually irreproachable source.

The Azarole, a small thorny tree, flowers in the spring and has small apple-like fruit not dissimilar to rose haws (both are from the family *Rosaceae*).<sup>2</sup> The Azarole has no particular importance in medieval medicine, and Amirdovlat lists the plant name and Arabic equivalent without further comment. The Azarole (= Gk. κρόταιγος) is mentioned neither in Dioscorides nor Galen. The Arabic term *al-zu'rūr* is found in Avicenna, Rhazes, Ibn al-Baytar and others, and there it is the specific name for the Medlar tree (of this confusion, see the comments by Theophrastus below).

Arm. ալւճ *aluč* is an alternate form of *alawč* above. Here we note the Turkish original الوج *alauj* or *alūj*; the reduced grade الج *aluj* is also known, and this root Turkish root could be reflected either by Arm. *alawč* or by *aluč*. It functions in its one Middle Armenian appearance, in a sense similar to *alawč*, in the *Book of Labors*, Գիրք վաստակոյն, *The Armenian Geoponica*.<sup>3</sup> There is only one printed edition of the Armenian

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<sup>1</sup> Amirdovlar is the greatest of the Armenian physicians, and a master of the Arabic school (of which Avicenna and Rhazes were the most influential) which he modified according to his own thoughts. His most famous work, *Useless for the Ignorant or a Dictionary of Medicinal Substances*, (Անգիտաց անպէտ կամ բառարան բժշկական ցիրոյն), was composed between 1478 and 1482.

<sup>2</sup> The English term *haw* is curious, largely meaning the fruity bulb produced by most shrubs and trees of the family *Rosaceae*; but the term *haw* in addition has the meaning 'hedge' (OE *haga* 'hedge'), and 'hawthorn' more likely had the earlier meaning 'hedge-thorn' since hawthorns are used in hedgerows.

<sup>3</sup> This text dates from the thirteenth century but has no direct relationship

*Book of Labors* (Venice 1877:155), and it is not known what manuscripts it was derived from; it does not appear to be a scholarly since the apparatus is miniscule. There are numerous suspect readings and the term appears here as ալուճ *aluč*, usually glossed as 'toad-flax, *Linaria vulgaris* L.' put the passage it appears in makes that impossible since it must, according to the text, be a flowering tree. The passage is a chapter head, and reads Վասն սերկեիլի, դամոնի, կեռասի եւ սնձեաց, որ է ալուճն 'Concerning the quince tree, plum tree, sweet cherry tree, and *sinj*<sup>4</sup> which is the *aluč*.' That the use of *aluč* here cannot be the Toad-flax, a flowering weed, but 'Hawthorn' is clear from the small fruits the prune and cherry tree bear, and its exact correlation with Arm. *sinj*, which appears in the Galen dictionary glossing a Greek word similar to Gk. μέσπιλον 'Medlar tree.' But for Arm. *sinj* we have glosses, in the various manuscripts, in Armenian script, of *mesmelion*, *mesmelion* and *mezvetion*.<sup>5</sup> There is no other word, either in Greek or in Arabic<sup>6</sup> which approaches this term, and there appears to have been some confusion between the Medlar and the Azarole tree from an early date.<sup>7</sup> The Medlar, as the various Hawthorn trees, is of the family *Rosaceae*, having haws and thorns. But they are, in the Galen dictionary, two separate entries, and two separate Armenian glosses. And just as etymologicval

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to the Greek *Geoponica*, of the tenth century. For a discussion of the lineage, see J. Greppin, "The Armenian and the Greek *Geoponica*." *Proceedings of the International Conference on Armenian Medieval Literature*. Yerevan: Press of the Armenian Academy of Sciences: 1990 and *Byzantion* 57, 1987:46-55.

- 4 A more frequently used term in Armenian for the Azarole tree.
- 5 The Greek term for 'Medlar tree' is spelled, in Armenian script, as *mespelon*, *mesp'eton*, *mespelon*, and *meapeton*, all clearly the μέσπελον.
- 6 Certain Arabic terms appear in the Galen dictionary in addition to the Greek.
- 7 Theophrastus (*HP* III xv 6) comments on the great similarity between the Medlar and the Azarole; they have similar leaves, smooth bark, and the fruits taste alike.

theory among the ancients puzzles us, so one must also bear in mind the differences in perceived botanical morphology. We might also point out

that the Turkish equivalent, *الوج، الج، aluj, alūj*, which is either a derived form or the original, has the meaning 'Azarole' (Redhouse).<sup>8</sup>

Arm. *ալունճ aluč* is also recorded in Amirdovlat (#62), where we read *ալունճ. որ է ինքն մուխալլասային ցեղերու. որ պ. քազնար կասեն* "aluč is of the *muxallasay* genus, which is Per. *k'aznar*." The term

*muxallasay* is well known, from Ar. *مخلصه* 'Toad-flax'.<sup>9</sup> The reference to Per. *k'aznar*, under any of the various possible spellings, is otherwise unsupported by the Persian lexicographers.

Arm. *ալունճի aloči* is noted in the *Haybusak*<sup>10</sup> (#22) where Alishan identifies it as 'the fruit of the Azarole.' However, though *-i* is a noun forming suffix (cf. *gini* 'wine'), I know of no parallel stem with an extension in *-i* used to form a fruit name from the word for the plant. The *Haybusak* does not list a source for the word, and the modern Armenian lexicographers view *aloči*, along with additional derivatives, such as *aločik* and *aločeni*, as alternate forms of *aloč*, the tree.

Thus, Arm. *aloč*, *alawč*, and *aloči* are the tree 'Azarole,' and *aluč*, an uncommon word, stands for 'toad-flax.'

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Древнетюркский словарь*, Moscow, Nauka: 1969, there is the entry *aluč* 'Plum tree, *Prunus domestica*,' which appears in the lexicon of Muhammad Kashgarsi (1072-1074), and though there is question about the accuracy of the gloss, the Turkish attestation precedes the Armenian, and the Armenian term might be secondary to the Turkish. Actually, OTrk. *aluč* might be directly related to the term *ալունճի aluc'i*, not recorded in earlier literature, but which is identified as a 'Plum tree' *Բուսանունների . . . բառարան*, Ruben S. Ghazaryan, Yerevan, Yerevan University Press: 1981.

<sup>9</sup> This gloss is nowhere contradicted, and its tie in with the Arabic is most solid

<sup>10</sup> *Հայբուսակ կամ Բայկական բուսաբանութիւն*, Venice 1895.